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BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

5 December 1952

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Allan Evans (CIR)
Colonel Gerald F. Lillard, USA (G-2)
Captain Allan L. Reed, USN (ONI)
Colonel Jack E. Thomas, USAF (AFVIN-2A)
Captain John A. Holbrook, USN (JIG)

SUBJECT : SE-34: Consequences of an Attempt to Overthrow
the Present Regime in Albania

1. The attached text is forwarded for your consideration.
2. Informal discussion in the IAC as to timing and the
schedule previously circulated in our memorandum dated 26 November
notwithstanding, we request that your representative meet with
us at 2:00 Thursday, 11 December, in Room 146 South Building.
3. Please continue to exercise special security precautions
in handling this estimate.

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Executive Secretary

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C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

5 December 1952

SUBJECT: SE-34: CONSEQUENCES OF AN ATTEMPT TO OVERTHROW THE
PRESENT REGIME IN ALBANIA

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the consequences of an attempt to overthrow the
present regime in Albania.

ESTIMATE

I. THE PRESENT SITUATION

1. In Albania there is widespread dissatisfaction with the
present regime. Even within the Albanian Government and within the
Albanian Communist Party a loss of confidence in the long-term
prospects of the regime and an increased sense of personal insecurity
appear to have developed.

2. Resistance activity in Albania has increased during the
past year, in part as a result of increased activity by emigre
elements, some of them supported by Western governments. Rumors

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and reports of plans for the overthrow of the Hoxha regime have been widely circulated. Most of the European intelligence services, including those of the USSR and Albania, are probably aware of connections of the emigres with Western governments and probably believe that some sort of plan for the overthrow of the Hoxha regime is in the making.

3. Both the USSR and the present Albanian leaders have demonstrated sensitivity and uneasiness over this situation and have publicly accused the West, and especially the US, of "organizing provocations" against Albania.

4. The USSR almost certainly desires to keep Albania within the Soviet Bloc, even though it is an economic liability and an indefensible outpost. Loss of Albania would be damaging to Soviet prestige. Nevertheless, the USSR has not entered into a mutual assistance pact with Albania, as it has with its other European Satellites (except East Germany). Albania has such a pact only with Bulgaria.

5. The interests of Italy, Greece, and Yugoslavia in Albania conflict, and each of these three countries probably prefers continuance of the status quo to a change which might prove favorable to any of the others.

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6. Of these three, Yugoslavia appears most sanguine about eventually achieving some change in the Albanian regime favorable to itself. As we estimated in NIE-42/1 (20 October 1952), there are advantages for Yugoslavia in its present policy of applying political pressure against the Albanian regime without directly intervening or precipitating a coup attempt. By continuing their present course, the Yugoslavs can promote the predominance of the Yugoslav-supported group within the Albanian emigre movement. They can undermine order and stability in Albania without serious risk of international complications, while developing contacts with disaffected elements within the Albanian regime. If successful in these efforts, they will have placed themselves in a favorable position to exploit any safe opportunity for intervention or to exercise preponderant influence in any new regime.

7. We believe that the Yugoslavs have no present intention of precipitating a coup against the Hoxha regime. They probably calculate that to do so would create serious dangers to Yugoslavia and seriously weaken its moral and political position. They probably would stage a coup, if they thought it could be done without these dangers; they might therefore be willing to cooperate with other powers in a coup attempt at some future date. However, such cooperation probably would be contingent

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upon sufficient Yugoslav control over the method and nature of the coup attempt to limit the dangers to Yugoslavia and at the same time to provide Yugoslavia a favorable opportunity for eventual domination of the new Albanian regime.

8. The other nations of Western Europe, including the UK, almost certainly prefer the status quo in Albania to the risks which would be involved in an attempt to establish a pro-Western regime.

II. REACTIONS TO A COUP ATTEMPT

A. Soviet Bloc Reaction

9. The Soviet Bloc reaction to a coup attempt against the Hoxha regime would depend upon the manner and speed in which the coup was carried out, the reactions of other interested powers, and the global situation existing at the time.

10. If the USSR should learn of a coup plan in advance and in sufficient detail, it almost certainly would take preventive action. A variety of such actions would be possible, ranging from improved security precautions and liquidations within Albania to the dispatch of Soviet or

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Satellite forces by sea or air and shows of force on the Yugoslav and Greek borders. The Soviet leaders would exploit the situation so as to create maximum division, suspicion, and mistrust among the NATO countries and within the free world generally. If the USSR did not learn of a planned coup in advance, but the coup was quickly suppressed by the present Albanian regime, much of the same situation would obtain, and the USSR would exploit fully the opportunity to spread suspicion and fear in the free world.

11. If a coup was attempted and approved a quick success, the Soviet leaders would be faced with a difficult decision. Several possibilities present themselves:

a. Global war: We believe it highly unlikely that the Soviet leaders would deliberately initiate global war over Albania.

b. Local military counteraction: Regardless of who initiated or supported the coup, the Soviet leaders might conclude that to accept the loss of Albania would open the Soviet Bloc to new and stronger challenges which would result in eventual and serious losses of position. Therefore, they

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might direct the European Satellites to advance through Yugoslavia in order to come to Albania's assistance. They would, in such an event, expect serious strains to develop in the North Atlantic coalition. On the other hand, they would recognize the risk that the West would come to Yugoslavia's support and the consequent grave danger of global war. We believe that the chances of the USSR taking this risk are less than even.

c. Acceptance of the loss of Albania and retaliation

elsewhere: If the Soviet leaders were unwilling to accept the risks of global war which would be implicit in local military counteraction, they would be obliged to accept the loss of Albania. However, the Soviet leaders would probably, so far as their capabilities permitted, intensify their pressures at vulnerable points in the free world, e.g., in Berlin, Vienna, Iran, or Indochina. They might in this manner be able to offset the psychological effect of the Albanian loss by making gains elsewhere or creating new fears and divisions in the West.

d. Political counteractions: At a minimum the USSR would intensify its propaganda campaign against the West, exploiting whatever rifts had occurred in connection with the Albanian coup.

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It might make shows of force and attempt to divide the West by threats of war. It might, depending upon its assessment of the attitudes of the various member nations, take an appeal to the UN or encourage some uncommitted country to do so. It would make every effort to demonstrate that any Western effort to roll back the Iron Curtain could not be accomplished with impunity.

12. If a coup was attempted, failed to meet with quick success and became a civil war, Soviet opportunities for defeating it and exploiting it politically would be very good. Satellite reinforcements could be brought into Albania initially by air and later by sea. On the other hand, the emigres are too few in number to fight a civil war and there would be strong sentiment in the West against providing forces.

13. In the long run, if local or global war were avoided, a coup attempt in Albania, whether successful or not, would make little difference in the Soviet attitude toward the West. Already convinced of the West's implacable hostility and of an inevitable struggle for power between the Communist and capitalist worlds, the Soviet leaders would regard the coup attempt merely as a phase of that struggle. It probably would conclude, however, that the West was accelerating the pace of the struggle. It probably would, therefore, intensify its military preparations and improve its war-readiness.

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14. A coup attempt in Albania, particularly if it were successful, would raise the hopes of dissident elements within the other Satellite countries. It might in some cases provoke premature and futile resistance efforts. It almost certainly would provoke greater security efforts by the Soviet authorities.

B. Yugoslavia

15. Because of their recent predominance in Albania, their hopes to re-establish dominance in any new regime, and their extreme vulnerability to any Soviet or Satellite counteraction, the Yugoslavs almost certainly regard any attempt to overthrow the Albanian regime as a matter of vital concern to their national interests. If such an attempt proved successful and did not provoke Soviet retaliation, the Yugoslavs would almost certainly make intensive efforts to dominate it. If the coup attempt proved unsuccessful, whether or not Yugoslavia participated, the Yugoslavs would make every effort to prove that they were not party to the scheme.

C. Greece and Italy

16. Because of their historic interests in Albania, both the Greeks and the Italians would be deeply concerned over any coup attempt in

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Albania. If the Yugoslavs initiated or participated in such a coup, to the exclusion of the Greeks and the Italians, both would be deeply resentful and would almost certainly endeavor to counteract Yugoslav influence. It is doubtful that they would individually take military action, but they would probably assume that they had been betrayed by their allies, and distrust and suspicion would thenceforth greatly reduce their cooperation in joint efforts to improve the Western security position in the Mediterranean. On the other hand, if the coup in Albania were to be carried out without Yugoslav participation and under US control, the Italians and Greeks would probably provide a measure of discreet cooperation. Once the new Albanian regime took over, both would try to establish influence over it.

D. Other European Nations

17. Because of their fear of upsetting the present precarious peace of Europe, the principal Western European powers, if consulted in advance, almost certainly would strongly advise against a coup in Albania. If such a coup were precipitated against their advice, or without consulting them, their reaction would be one of fear of Soviet retaliation and resentment at what they would regard as reckless and provocative action by the initiators. This would be particularly true if the US were identified with the coup. Even if the coup proved successful

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and did not provoke any serious Soviet retaliation, there would be continuing concern over further aggressive US initiatives and fear of heightened Soviet counterpressures to offset the impact of Albania's loss. The governments of Western Europe, caught between popular feelings and their recognition of the need for avoiding division within the Western coalition, would face difficult parliamentary situations. Most of them probably would be able to continue their policies in support of the North Atlantic alliance, but with more hazards and delays. If the coup proved unsuccessful and the US was clearly identified with it, the US moral and political position in Europe, and probably elsewhere as well, would suffer serious reverses. By and large, regardless of the outcome, there would be a strong feeling among the major Western European powers that too much had been risked for too small a potential gain.

III. PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN ALBANIA IN THE EVENT OF A SUCCESSFUL COUP

18. Any new regime in Albania, regardless of its leadership, orientation, or outside support, would face substantial -- but not insoluble -- internal problems. Solution of the immediate problem, to establish order, would depend upon the satisfactory execution of the coup. If the new leadership was strong and competent, the people

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generally would probably support it. The new regime would require not only political and military support, but also continuing economic support by the West, presumably by the US. If the major Western powers, and particularly the US, announced and fulfilled an intention to provide political and economic support to the new regime, Albanian popular support almost certainly would be forthcoming.

19. For some time after the coup regime was installed its precise political orientation would probably be in doubt. As noted above, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Italy would all try to gain some kind of special position or predominance. The Greeks would want a special status for northern Epirus, the Italians would want economic concessions, the Yugoslavs would try to infiltrate and eventually to dominate the regime. While there are many Albanians who are patriotic and desirous of following a national policy, Albania, as a small, poor, and undeveloped country, has always depended upon some other power for support and protection.

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